

Promoting youth intergroup contact in a post-accord society: the role of supportive interaction norms and self-expansion

Perceiving supportive peer norms is associated with more frequent and higher quality intergroup contact across a range of contexts. Youth interactions, however, are influenced by a wide range of socialising agents as well as individuals' desire to interact. Exploring both socialising agents and individual-level variables, the present research examines whether perceived peer, school and family interaction norms, and self-expansion, are associated with contact quality and quantity in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Across two time points, 312 14- to 17- year-olds ($M = 14.71$, $SD = 0.70$; 55% male; 66% Protestant, 33% Catholic) from three secondary schools participated. Results indicate that amongst our participants perceiving supportive peer norms (not school or family) at Time 1 was associated with more frequent contact at Time 2, whilst perceived supportive family norms (not peer or school) at Time 1 was associated with greater quality of contact at Time 2. Implications are discussed in relation to the effects of perceived norms and self-expansion on youth intergroup contact in Northern Ireland as well as opportunities for promoting peace in divided societies.

Keywords: norms; intergroup contact; self-expansion; youth; Northern Ireland

Public Significance Statement

This article explores some of the different factors that influence whether young people in Belfast, Northern Ireland choose to interact with people from the other community and if they do, whether those interactions are good quality or not. Findings show that young people who feel that their peers support them to interact with people from the other community interact more and that young people who feel that their family supports them, have been quality interactions.

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There is strong empirical evidence that perceiving your peers support you to interact with different ethnic or racial groups is associated with more frequent and higher quality intergroup contact (Tropp et al., 2014; McKeown & Taylor, 2018). To date, however, the research on such perceived supportive norms for contact has tended to focus on a limited range of norms to understand contact engagement. This is potentially problematic for understanding how to promote peace in conflict settings because youth attitudes and behaviours are influenced by a much larger range of socialising agents beyond peers, including the family and the school. The present research aims to push forward current understanding by exploring the extent to which different perceived norms of interaction are associated with contact quality and quantity in a post-accord generation. Moving beyond socialising agent affects, the present research also explores whether individual differences play a role in understanding intergroup contact engagement. Specifically, we examine whether more and better-quality contact is evident amongst youth who score higher on self-expansion. This assertion is based on the premise that self-expansion is an important individual difference measure that is associated with greater interest in intergroup contact and better-quality interactions (Paolini et al., 2016). Bringing together two time point survey data, we test these assertions amongst a sample of youth attending secondary schools in Belfast, Northern Ireland. We focus our research specifically on Northern Ireland due to its history of conflict and its ongoing struggle for peace. Youth growing up in Northern Ireland are experiencing a fragile peace where despite the signing and implementation of a peace accord in 1998, low levels of violence remain with intergroup contact interventions often applied or considered as a potential solution to building better relations between the two main Catholic and Protestant groups.

Perceived Norms and Intergroup Contact

Perceived social norms, perceived rules about how to act or behave in society, have been found to predict a range of youth attitudes and behaviours, including intergroup attitudes (e.g., Eller et al., 2007; Viki et al., 2006), intergroup contact experiences (McKeown & Taylor, 2018) and interest in intergroup contact (e.g., Tropp et al., 2014; Tropp et al., 2016). For the most part, however, research focused on exploring how perceived norms might be associated with intergroup contact has focused on norms at the peer and/or school level (e.g., Tezanos-Pinto et al., 2010; Tropp et al., 2016; McKeown & Taylor, 2018). An important exception to this can be found in the work of Smith and Minescu (2021) who assessed the relationship between the perception of five different types of ingroup norms (family, class-peers, Irish, religious and all-humanity) and children's levels of prejudice towards refugees in Ireland. Overall, however, exploring perceived norm effects fails to fully grapple with the range of norms that youth are exposed to and their potential different and collective effects on youth intergroup contact experiences. This omission may be particularly important for youth growing up in conflict settings, where intergroup contact is one of the most promising tools to promote better relations and as such, understanding more about whether and how a range of norms might influence whether and how young people choose to interact with those from 'the other side' may inform future intervention. In the present research, therefore, we focus on perceived normative support for intergroup contact amongst three of the most important socialising agents in young people's lives: their peers, their school, and their family.

Perceived peer norms are perhaps the most researched in terms of understanding youth intergroup attitudes and interaction experiences. Evidence shows, for example, that perceived peer norms are associated with intergroup attitudes (Mähönen et al., 2011) as well as with factors that influence interactions such as intergroup anxiety (Tezanos-Pinto et al., 2010). When it comes to exploring the effects of perceived norms on intergroup contact more specifically, there is less research but that which does exist, indicates a strong link between the two. For example, perceived norms of inclusion have been found to be associated with increased intentions and willingness to engage in cross-group friendship

amongst children and adolescents (Cameron et al., 2011; Tropp, et al. 2014; Tropp et al., 2016) as well as higher levels of intergroup contact quality and quantity amongst adolescents in Northern Ireland (McKeown & Taylor, 2018). It stands to reason, therefore, that we would expect to see perceived norms of inclusion i.e., where youth perceive their peers as being supportive of interactions, being associated with more frequent and better-quality contact. We therefore hypothesis that perceived peer support at Time 1 will be associated with reporting more frequent and better-quality contact at Time 2.

When it comes to perceived school norms, there is also some evidence of their effects on youth intergroup attitudes and behaviours. For example, McKeown and Taylor (2022) found that perceiving supportive teacher norms was associated with collective action for refugees amongst youth in Belfast, through collective efficacy, and Nesdale and Lawson (2011) found that school norms of inclusion were associated with more positive outgroup attitudes. Similarly, research on school climate norms (e.g., perceiving norms of diversity) has found that youth who perceived a school climate that promoted contact reported higher levels of intercultural competence (Schwarzenthal et al., 2020). Compared to the research on peer norm effects, however, there is less research on the potential effects of perceived school norm effects on interactions and of the research that does exist, findings are mixed. For example, Tropp et al., (2014) found that perceived school inclusion norms were associated with interest in intergroup contact over time amongst school students in the US, whilst McKeown and Taylor (2018) found that perceived school interaction norms were not associated with intergroup contact quality or quantity amongst youth in Northern Ireland. Given the larger evidence on school diversity climate and norm effects on intergroup attitudes, we hypothesise that perceived school norms of supportive interaction at Time 1 should be associated positively with more frequent and higher quality intergroup contact at Time 2.

In terms of family norms, there is substantial evidence of the role of the family in the general development of youth intergroup attitudes and behaviours (Aboud & Levy, 2002, Abrams et al., 2003). For example, research shows that parent socialisation influences youth

development of prejudicial attitudes over time (Rodríguez-García & Wagner, 2009) and that parent disapproval for intergroup contact predicted racial attitudes over time (Devine, 1989). Research on family norm effects on youth intergroup contact experiences more specifically, is somewhat more limited but of the evidence that does exist there is some support for a link between the two. For example, Smith and Minescu (2021) found that perceived supportive family norms were associated with children reporting more outgroup warmth and stronger intentions to engage in intergroup contact. There is also some evidence that parental attitudes can reduce desires for contact. For example, Ata et al., (2009) found that perceived parent support for interactions was strongly associated with desires for social distancing, suggesting that parent's attitudes might prevent youth from engaging in contact. Based on these studies, we hypothesise that perceiving family support for interactions at Time 1 will be associated with youth reporting more frequent and better-quality contact at Time 2.

Self- Expansion and Intergroup Contact

Whilst we know quite a lot about perceived norm effects on interaction, we know much less about what types of people might seek or benefit most from intergroup interactions. It is for this reason that in addition to exploring the relationship between different perceived norms and intergroup contact that we explore another potential predictor variable. In this case, we focus specifically on self-expansion, an individual differences variable that aims to explain the attitudes and behaviours underlying close relationships. Simply put, self-expansion can be conceptualised as being open to different perspectives, challenges and novelty. Self-expansion has been argued to be an important predictor of the intention to engage in intergroup contact in that it encourages the exploration of the motives and expectancies associated with engaging in intergroup contact (Paolini et al., 2016).

The self-expansion model proposed by Aron et al. (2001; 2013) is based on two key principles. The first is that people have a fundamental need to expand themselves, which increases their ability to accomplish goals. The second is that these needs can be met through close social relationships, in which other's perspectives and experiences are

embraced by the self (Aron & Tomlinson, 2018). Therefore, it is likely that the motivation to self-expand can be met through interactions with (diverse) others I.e., intergroup contact. Contact with outgroup members can offer unique opportunities to acquire valuable knowledge, skills and perspectives (Wright et al., 2002), which contributes to satisfying the need to expand the self. In other words, it can be argued that if an individual is high on self-expansion, then they may be more interested in forming close relationships, including with outgroup members (Aron et al., 2006; Paolini et al., 2016).

Research taking a multilevel approach to understanding the motivators of intergroup contact has posited self-expansion as a promising individual difference measure to include in the dialogue (see Kauff et al., 2020). In both interpersonal and intergroup contexts, individuals differ in contact expectations, and the extent to which the idea that social relationships can facilitate the expansion of one's knowledge and skills varies. In this regard, self-expansion motivation may be a key factor in whether people choose to exploit contact opportunities or not. Thus, it has been associated with greater interest in intergroup contact and better-quality interactions (Paolini et al., 2016). Further evidence for the effects of self-expansion on contact-related outcomes is evidenced by Dys-Steenbergen, Wright, and Aron (2015) who found that individuals who were primed to consider the benefits of self-expansion, prior to interacting with an ethnic outgroup member, reported greater feelings of pleasure and closeness during the exchange, as well as increased feelings of self-growth and social efficacy later.

The Present Research

Building on established findings, the present research aimed to explore the extent to which different perceived support for interaction norms as well as individual levels of self-expansion desires are associated with contact quality and quantity in a post-accord generation of youth in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland is a divided society (Shirlow & Murtagh, 2006) marred by the legacy of intergroup conflict between two competing groups; those who wish Northern Ireland to

remain part of the United Kingdom and those who wish Northern Ireland to reunify with the island of Ireland, understood broadly as the Protestant and Catholic communities respectively (McKeown, 2013; Cairns & Darby, 1998). Northern Ireland is now a post-accord society following the signing of the Peace Agreement in 1998. Relations, however, remain contentious with low-levels of sectarian violence, and segregation and negative attitudes remain (Taylor et al., 2016). Youth in Northern Ireland, therefore, are growing up in fragile peace where the cycles of violence (albeit much lower than in previous years) continue. The present research, therefore, is particularly important by exploring if and how intergroup contact (which is an important prejudice reduction tool) can be promoted amongst youth in this divided society.

Based on the reviewed literature, we controlled for age, gender, community background and socio-economic status (assessed by whether the adolescent received free school meals, or not). We hypothesised (1) that quantity and quality contact would be stable across the two time points; in other words, Time 1 and Time 2 values would be positively related within construct; (2) that higher perceived peer, family and school interaction norms at Time 1, will be positively associated with both quantity and quality contact at Time 2, and (3) that higher self-expansion at Time 1 would be positively associated with both quantity and quality contact at Time 2. We also explored the cross-lagged effects of contact; that is, if Time 1 quantity contact would relate to Time 2 quality contact, and vice versa. In summary, we wanted to understand how these predictors related to quantity and quality contact over time. We did not expect contact quantity or quality to change over time due to the short measurement interval between the two survey time points and due to no contact focused interventions being implemented or transition periods (e.g., movement between year groups) within the schools during the period of data collection.

Method

The present research is part of an ongoing larger research project working with youth in Belfast and Bradford to explore the predictors of intergroup contact over time through a

survey, and later through everyday experiences of intergroup contact using participatory approaches. The focus of this analysis utilises Time 1 and Time 2 data from Belfast to explore the relationship between perceived interaction norms, self-expansion, and intergroup contact.

Sample

A total of 488 participants completed the survey at Time 1 and 419 participants completed the survey at Time 2. Of those participants, we were able to match data for 344 across the two timepoints. As we were interested specifically in Catholic-Protestant relations, we removed 32 participants from who were not born in Northern Ireland, Ireland or the wider UK context ($n = 29$) or had missing data on this variable ($n = 3$) at Time 1. This resulted in a final sample of 312 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 14.71$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 0.70$; 118 female, 173 male, 21 other gender; 191 Protestant, 94 Catholic, 24 mixed or other background; 28% reported receiving free school meals), across the three participating schools in Belfast.

Recruitment

Due to our interest in exploring youth Catholic-Protestant interactions we initially aimed to recruit schools in Belfast with youth enrolled from both the Catholic and Protestant communities to take part in the research. Using school level data available on the Northern Ireland Department of Education website, we first contacted all post-primary schools in Belfast where no more than 60% of youth were from either the Catholic or Protestant community ($n = 7$) in July 2021. Following expressions of interest from two of these schools, meetings were held to discuss the wider project, and both agreed to take part. This included one grammar school (1,438 enrolled, 44% Protestant) and one integrated school (628 enrolled, 44% Protestant)¹. In September 2021, we then contacted a further 11 schools who

¹ *Grammar schools are voluntary schools managed by a Board of Governors. These schools are either primarily Catholic, primarily Protestant or mixed. Integrated schools are voluntary schools managed by a Board of Governors. These schools have a mixed intake and aim to educate Catholic and Protestant young people together, they are supported by the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education. Controlled schools are managed by a Board of Governors with the Education Authority being the employing authority. These schools are primarily Protestant although there are*

had no more than 85% of youth from either of the Catholic or Protestant community and following this, one further school agreed to take part (controlled school, 1,093 enrolled, 85% Protestant). In the grammar school ($n = 168$), 31% of participants reported having a Catholic background, 61.3% of participants reported having a Protestant background, and reported any other background. In the integrated school ($n = 99$), 44.4% of participants reported having a Catholic background, 43.4% reported having a Protestant background and 12.1% reported any other background. In the controlled school ($n = 45$), 100% of participants reported having a Protestant background.

Measures

In addition to a series of demographic questions (i.e., age, gender, community background and free school meal as a proxy for socio-economic status), participants completed the following survey measures (see Appendix for complete scales):

Self-expansion. To measure self-expansion, a 7-item scale adapted from Paolini et al. (2016) was used. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with each of the 7 statements, ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The original scale items 3,5,10,11 and 12 were removed to simplify the language for a younger sample, reduce overlap and shorten the overall survey. Example statements included: '*Having social relationships makes me learn new things*', and '*Through my social relationships with others, I can become a better person*'. Higher scores indicated more positive expanding attitude in social interaction and internal consistency of the scale was high (Time 1 $\alpha = .94$).

Contact quantity. Adapted from Tam et al. (2009), contact quantity was measured by a 4-item scale asking participants to rate on a scale ranging from 0 (*none*) to 3 (*a lot*) how much contact they have with each of the Protestant and Catholic communities '*at school*', '*in your neighbourhood*', '*across all social situations*' and '*online/ on social media*'. For outgroup

some controlled integrated and Irish Medium schools.

contact, a higher score implied higher frequency outgroup contact with good internal consistency (Time 1 $\alpha = .89$; Time 2: $\alpha = .99$).

Contact quality. To measure contact quality, participants responded to a series of bi-polar adjectives regarding how they find it when they meet people from the Protestant and Catholic communities in general. This included: *do you find the contact pleasant or unpleasant* (0 *very unpleasant* to 5 *very pleasant*), *do you find the contact competitive (trying to 'win' or 'beat' each other) or cooperative (where you work together)* (0 *very competitive* to 5 *very cooperative*), *do you find the contact casual (e.g., conversations that don't really matter) or meaningful (e.g., having deep or personal conversations)* (0 *very casual* to 5 *very meaningful*). An additional item was developed to measure online contact quality *'When you interact with people online from the following communities, do you find the contact pleasant or unpleasant'* (0 *very unpleasant* to 5 *very pleasant*). The items for the outgroup were combined together, with higher scores indicating higher quality of contact (Time 1: $\alpha = .95$; Time 2: $\alpha = .99$).

Peer interaction norms. The developed measure for perceived peer interaction norms combined items previously used by Tropp et al. (2014) and Charlesford (2017) and adapted them for the Northern Ireland context. Participants were asked to rate from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) how much they agreed with a series of 6 statements including: *'My friends would approve of me being good friends with people from the other community'* and *'My friends would expect me to treat people from the other community with respect'*. Higher scores indicated perceived peer norms that were more supportive of intergroup contact (Time 1 $\alpha = .97$).

School interaction norms. Adapted from Charlesford (2017) and Tropp et al. (2014) perceived school interaction norms were assessed by two items on a 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) Likert scale. Participants rated the extent to which they agreed with the

following statements: *'My teachers would approve of me being good friends with young people from the other community'*, and *'My teachers encourage me to be friends with young people from the other community'*. Scores on these two items were combined to create a single measure of perceived school interaction norms (Time 1 $\alpha = .97$).

Family interaction norms. The developed measure for family interaction norms combined items previously used by Tropp et al. (2014) and Charlesford (2017) and adapted them for the Northern Ireland context. Participants were asked to rate from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) how much they agreed with a series of 6 statements including: *'My family would approve of me being good friends with people from the other community'* and *'My family would expect me to treat people from the other community with respect'*. Higher scores indicated a perception of family norms that were more supportive of intergroup contact (Time 1 $\alpha = .99$).

Procedure

Trained researchers collected data during the 2021-22 school year in each of the three Belfast schools: in Autumn 2021 (Time 1) and Winter 2021 (Time 2). In the presence of the teachers and researchers, youth participants were asked to complete a survey either online in computer rooms using Qualtrics (in two schools) or on paper (in one school) in classrooms during school hours. Parents of all youth were sent information about the research at least one week before data collection; this included providing them with the opportunity to opt-out their young person from the research as well as complete a survey of their own. On the day of data collection, each teacher was provided with an information pack and youth were asked to read the information sheet and decide whether or not to take part in the research. All youth participants were asked to give informed consent prior to taking part. The researchers circulated the rooms and were present to answer questions during data collection. Some youth whose parents had chosen to opt them out ($n = 10$ at Time 1 and $n = 15$ at Time 2) still completed the survey, depending on the school, to prevent ostracism

within the classroom setting, but their data was then removed from the final dataset. Parents were informed of this possibility in advance in the parental information letter. The survey took approximately 30-40 minutes to complete. After completing the survey, all participants were given a £10 amazon voucher to thank them for their time. The same procedure was followed at each data collection time-point. Following completion of the project, schools were thanked for their time and support with a £500 payment. Data from the paper and pen surveys were input into SPSS and merged with the data collected via Qualtrics (online survey platform). Mean scores were computed for each of the outcome and predictor variables.

Data Analysis Plan

A path model in MPlus was conducted with quantity and quality of outgroup contact at Time 2 were entered as endogenous variables. We controlled for demographics (i.e., age in years, gender, community background, and free school meal status), along with Time 1 quantity and quality contact, the predictors of perceived peer interaction norms, school interaction norms, family interaction norms, and self-expansion at Time 1 were entered as exogenous variables. All exogenous variables, and the error variances of the endogenous variables, were allowed to correlate. Model fit statistics were evaluated by the following criteria: $\chi^2 p > .05$; CFI $> .90$; SRMR $< .08$; RMSEA $< .08$ (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Results

Figure 1 depicts the full model, which was an adequate fit to the data ($N = 312$, $\chi^2 (9) = 39.13$, $p < .001$; CFI = .90; TLI = .76; SRMR = .05; RMSEA = .10, 95% CI [.07, .14]. Regarding demographic controls, adolescent age, gender, community background and free school meal status did not significantly relate to quantity contact at Time 2. For quality contact at Time 2, neither age nor free school meal status were significant predictors; however, compared to boys, girls reported higher quality contact ($\beta = -.11$, $p = .024$), and compared to Catholics, adolescents from the Protestant community reported better quality contact ($\beta = .35$, $p < .001$).

The stability paths were both significant; in other words, Time 1 quantity and quality contact were significantly related to Time 2 reports for each construct (quantity: $\beta = .48, p < .001$; quality: $\beta = .29, p < .001$). In terms of the cross-lagged paths, while Time 1 quality contact did not relate to Time 2 quantity contact, there was a positive effect of quantity contact at Time 1 on quality contact at Time 2 ($\beta = .13, p = .047$).

Finally, regarding the primary predictors of interest, only Time 1 perceived peer interaction norms had the hypothesised positive effect on Time 2 quantity contact ($\beta = .13, p = .028$), while only perceived family interaction norms had the hypothesised positive effect on Time 2 quality contact ($\beta = .13, p = .015$). That is, perceived school interaction norms and self-expansion at Time 1 did not predict later quantity or quality contact. In sum, controlling for demographic variables as well as earlier values on each construct and their cross-lagged effects, later quantity contact was only significantly related to its Time 1 value and peer norms, while Time 2 quality contact was higher among girls and Protestants, linked to earlier quantity and quality contact, and more positive family norms.

Discussion

The present research aimed to explore the extent to which different perceived support for interaction norms and self-expansion motivation were associated with contact quality and quantity amongst a sample of youth growing up in post-accord Belfast, Northern Ireland. In support of our first hypothesis, we found that quantity of contact at Time 1 was positively related to quantity of contact at Time 2, and that quality of contact at Time 1 was positively related to quality of contact at Time 2, which shows that the constructs were stable across the two time points. This finding demonstrates the stability of contact despite opportunity for contact to occur and therefore aligns with previous research which argues that more than physical co-presence is needed to increase or change intergroup interactions (McKeown & Dixon, 2017).

Next, we explored the relationships between perceived normative support for interaction and contact quantity and quality, predicting that supportive peer, family, and school

interaction norms (Hypothesis 2) and higher self-expansion motives (Hypothesis 3) would be associated with increased quantity and quality of intergroup contact. Controlling for community background, gender, age, SES and quantity and quality of intergroup contact at Time 1, we found partial support for Hypothesis 2, in that perceiving more supportive peer interaction norms predicted more frequent outgroup contact at Time 2. This aligns with previous research within (McKeown & Taylor, 2018) and outside (Tropp et al., 2016) of the Northern Ireland context- fitting with the idea that the more supportive friends are of intergroup interactions, the more likely youth are to engage in them in the first place. In contrast to our hypothesis, we did not, however, find evidence for a relationship between either perceived school interaction norms and contact quantity, nor perceived family interaction norms on contact quantity. An explanation for this might come from a consideration of the developmental age of our participants whereby as young people go further through adolescence, peers become a particularly and more important socialising agent (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Wölfer et al., 2016). The lack of findings for perceived school interaction norm effects aligns with McKeown and Taylor (2018) who also did not observe a relationship between perceived school interaction norms and contact quantity in their research in Northern Ireland.

Interestingly, for contact quality we found that only perceived family (not peer or school) interaction norms at Time 1 was associated with better quality contact at Time 2. This finding points to the idea that when it comes to making the most out of interactions, that it is what your family thinks that counts- it could be, for example, that youth who feel supported by their family hold more quality interactions because of the very nature of being supported by those closest to them such that if your family supports you having an outgroup friend then you may be more likely to bring them home or introduce them to family members and loved ones. This may help to translate interactions from being casual to being more meaningful and therefore, higher quality. In addition, family members who actively support intergroup interactions, may engage in, and therefore model positive intergroup interactions themselves (Clark-Ibanez & Felmlee, 2004), which may also influence how younger family

members interact with diverse others. This is further bolstered by the finding that neither perceived peer nor perceived school interaction norms were associated with contact quality amongst this group of young people. Taken together, our findings demonstrate that when it comes to getting young people to interact across group lines, it is perceived peer interaction norms that are particularly important, whilst perceived family interaction norms are more important for the quality of the interaction experience with outgroup members. This demonstrates a need to explore how a wide range of socialising agents can affect youth intergroup interactions. We also found that compared to boys, girls reported higher quality contact, which corresponds with the large body of research that shows that girls tend to be more empathetic and have more meaningful social relationships than boys (e.g., Smith, 2015).

Our final hypothesis aimed to test whether individual differences, in this case self-expansion motivation, would be associated with the likelihood of youth engaging in and experiencing better quality intergroup contact. This was based on the premise that self-expansion has been argued to be associated with greater interest in intergroup contact and better-quality interactions (Paolini et al., 2016). In contrast to our expectations, however, we did not find an effect of self-expansion on either contact quantity or quality. This is somewhat surprising but may reflect that self-expansion is a relatively new concept that remains under-explored, especially within youth samples. These findings open-up new questions about how self-expansion might be best conceptualised, as well as ideas about how it relates to positive intergroup relations in this age group.

The collective findings of this research suggest that in our sample, it is the socialising agent effects of perceived interaction norms that are arguably more important in understanding youth contact experiences than the individual difference measure of self-expansion motivation. Our findings suggest that perceived peer interaction norms influence the quantity of outgroup contact but that perceived family interaction norms influence the quality of interactions. On the surface, this suggests that micro-, meso- and macro- level predictors may not hold the same weight when it comes to predicting contact, and that even

predictors within the same level (e.g., social norms), can have unique effects on contact quantity and quality. Nevertheless, when it comes to informing interventions focussed on positive intergroup relations, it is important to draw on potential predictors from different levels of analysis, and especially those that can be affected by intervention and/or social policy measures (Kauff, 2020). Given this, our findings imply that interventions focussing on promoting positive youth interactions, may benefit from taking a multi-generational stance, for example, by including both youth and their parents in the process. Furthermore, though norms that support intergroup interactions are important and desirable, norms that communicate the potential benefits of intergroup contact on satisfying individual needs and motives to self-expand may be of particular value (Dunne, 2013; Kauff et al., 2020). Taken together, it would be interesting to see whether informing parents/caregivers (especially those who have children attending diverse schools), of the benefits of cross-group friendships would influence support for intergroup interaction, and therefore contact.

Limitations and Future Directions

Whilst the present research offers a comprehensive evaluation of the effects of perceived interaction norms and self-expansion on intergroup contact quantity and quality, there are several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the data we report are cross-sectional which means that we cannot make conclusions about the direction of effects observed. Future research should aim to conduct longer-scale studies that consider perceived interaction norms over more than two time points to enable causal analyses. Second, our participants were recruited from a range of school-types across Belfast where there are variations in the types of contact that may be experienced. Future studies would benefit from exploring within and between school variation through a multi-level analysis- this would, of course, necessitate a much larger sample size. Third, we focused this paper on perceived interaction norms, but it may be that other norms are equally or more important in understanding youth interactions- for example, norms that emphasise the benefits of diversity and school climate norms of diversity, rather than norms of interaction. It may also be that

our measure of perceived school interaction norms was more reflective of teacher interaction norms specifically and as such, the measurement of school vs. teacher norms should be further extrapolated to determine whether there is a difference between perceiving general teacher compared to general school support for interaction. Future research, therefore, should aim to test these possibilities. Finally, our research focused on 14- to 17-year-olds which is a specific development period in which certain socialising agents may be more important than others. Future research should aim to explore the effects of different socialising agents over time to determine which are more influential in promoting or inhibiting intergroup interactions during which age ranges. Equally, future research would benefit from exploring the notion of self-expansion from a social, developmental perspective – e.g., is it conceptualised in a similar way in adolescence as it is in adulthood. This would also help to inform intervention.

Despite these limitations, this research makes an important contribution to the literature on the differential effects of peer, school and family norms on the quantity and quality of intergroup contact. The research also lends itself to the body of literature that explores the influence of different predictors (from different levels of analysis) on intergroup contact. Taken together, the findings add to our understanding of how to promote positive intergroup relations among youth living in post-accord Belfast and may offer some understanding of the importance of norms for other conflict or post-accord contexts where intergroup contact is applied as a peace promotion tool.

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Table 1

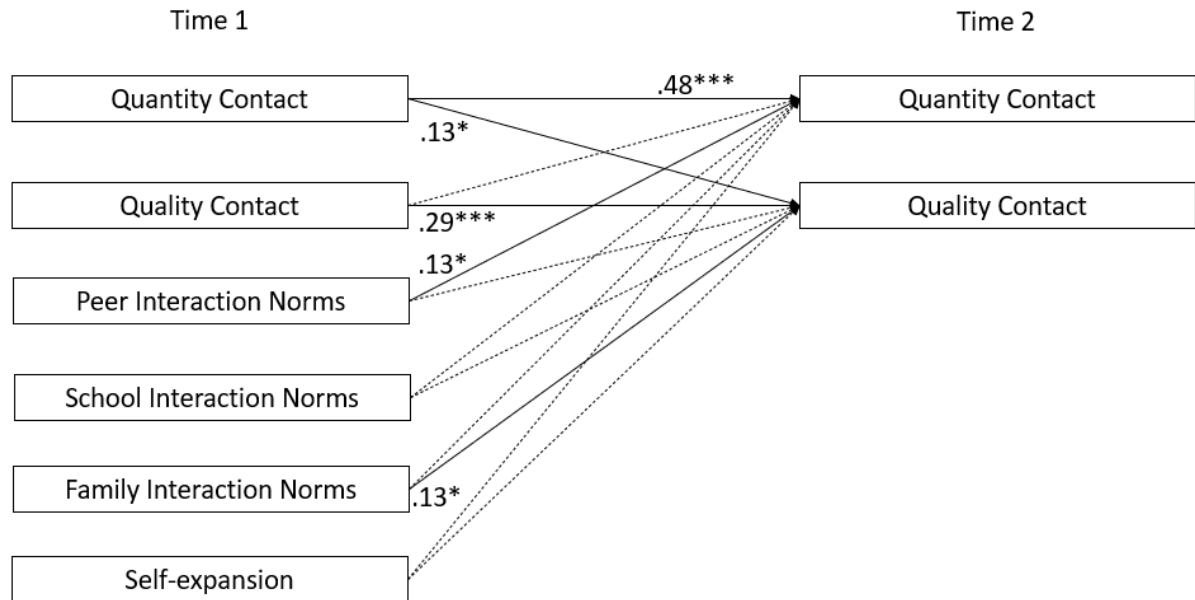
Means, standard deviations and correlations for all study variables (n= 312)

	M	SD	Range	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Age	14.71	0.70	14-17	- 0.08	0.03	.05	-0.02	0.01	0.07	0.05	0.07	0.06	-0.05	-0.05
2 Male	55% male, 45% female			-	0.06	0.05	0.07	-0.10	0.01	0.11*	0.11	0.10	0.02	0.02
3 Protestant	66% Protestant, 33% Catholic				-	-0.04	0.07	-0.10	0.05	0.21**	0.74**	0.72**	0.68**	0.68**
4 FSM	28% received FSM					-	-0.01	0.05	-0.03	-0.02	0.02	0.01	-0.01	-0.01
5 Peer interaction norms	3.62	0.84	0-5				-	0.18*	0.41*	0.58**	0.04	0.19*	0.03	0.03
6 School interaction norms	4.15	0.64	0-5					-	0.23**	0.13*	-	-0.11*	-0.01	0.01
7 Family interaction norms	3.87	0.66	0-5						-	0.47**	0.01	0.09	-0.01	-0.01
8 Self-expansion	3.72	0.40	0-5							-	0.15*	0.24**	0.14*	0.14*
9 Quantity contact (T1)	1.65	0.48	0-3								-	0.97**	0.52**	0.52**
10 Quality contact (T1)	2.68	1.06	0.5									-	0.50**	0.50**
11 Quantity contact (T2)	1.72	0.40	0-3										-	1.00**
12 Quality contact (T2)	2.62	1.03	0-5											-

Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01; T1 = participant report at Time 1, T2 = participant report at Time 2; FSM= Free School Meal status.

Figure 1

Model predicting later quantity and quality contact amongst youth in Belfast (N = 312; χ^2 (9) = 39.13, $p < .001$; CFI = .90; TLI = .76; SRMR = .05; RMSEA = .10, 95% CI [.07, .14]. Demographic controls omitted for readability. Exogenous variables allowed to correlate. Standardized regression coefficients reported. Non-significant paths indicated with dotted lines.



Appendix

Self-expansion

Scale: 0 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree

1. Having social relationships makes me learn new things
2. Engaging socially with other people results in me having new experiences
3. Having social relationships gives me the chance to meet new people
4. Social relationships are important because they expose me to people with different interests
5. Attention check- please click "strongly agree" Social interactions allow me to explore the ideas of other people
6. Through my social relationships with others, I can become a better person
7. Having social relationships allows me to make new friends

Peer interaction norms

Scale: 0 = strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree

1. Young people from my community want to be friends with young people from the other community
2. My friends encourage me to be friends with young people from the other community.
3. My friends would approve of me being good friends with people from the other community
4. My friends would expect me to treat people from the other community with respect
5. My friends would get along well with people from the other community
6. My friends would be angry if they learned that I was getting close to people from the other community (reverse coded)
7. My friends are not too keen on people from the other community (reverse coded)

School interaction norms

Scale: 0= strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree

1. My teachers encourage me to be friends with young people from the other community
2. My teachers would expect me to treat people from the other community with respect

Family interaction norms

Scale: 0= strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree

1. My family encourage me to be friends with young people from the other community
2. My family would approve of me being good friends with people from the other community
3. My family would expect me to treat people from the other community with respect
4. My family would get along well with people from the other community
5. My family would be angry if they learned I was getting close to people from the other community (reverse coded)
6. My family are not too keen on people from the other community (reverse coded)

Contact quantity

Scale: 0= none; 3= a lot

1. How much contact do you have with people from the following communities at school?
Catholic Protestant

2. How much contact do you have with people from the following communities in your neighbourhood (where you live)?

Catholic Protestant

3. How much contact do you have with people from the following people communities across all social situations (e.g. when you go to the park, play sports, go shopping)?

Catholic Protestant

4. How much contact do you have with people from the following people communities online/ on social media (e.g. tiktok, instagram, youtube, online chat forums, online games)?

Catholic Protestant

Contact quality

1. In general, when you meet people from the following communities, do you find the contact pleasant or unpleasant?

Scale: 0= very unpleasant; 1= unpleasant, 2= somewhat unpleasant, 3= somewhat pleasant, 4= pleasant 5 = very pleasant

Catholic Protestant

2. In general, when you meet people from the following communities, do you find the contact competitive (trying to 'win' or 'beat' each other) or cooperative (where you work together)?

Scale: 0= very competitive; 1= competitive, 2= somewhat competitive, 3 = somewhat cooperative, 4 = cooperative, 5 =very cooperative

Catholic Protestant

3. In general, when you meet people from the following communities, do you find the contact casual (e.g., conversations that don't really matter) or meaningful (e.g., having deep or personal conversations)?

Scale: 0= very casual; 1= casual, 2= somewhat casual, 3 = somewhat meaningful, 4= meaningful, 5 = very meaningful

Catholic Protestant

4. When you interact with people online from the following communities, do you find the contact pleasant or unpleasant?

Scale: 0= very unpleasant; 5 = very pleasant

Catholic Protestant